(c) No, Sir.

(d) A number of people friendly measures have been taken in 2005-06 in Karnataka like.

(i) Collecting mail from the residences of customers through postmen for dispatch;

(ii) Segregated priority handling of marriage invitations through "VIVAHA" Channel;

(iii) Sale of City Bus Passes in select Post Offices in Bangalore;

(iv) Extension of Business hours of Post Offices in select important cities; and

(v) Break-fast delivery—(early morning delivery of speed post/ unregistered articles to the customer).

Construction of Dharmapuri Post Office building

2434. SHRI C. PERUMAL: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether a new building for Dharmapuri Head Post Office in Tamil Nadu has been constructed long back;

(b) if so, whether it has not been opened yet;

(c) the reasons for not opening it; and

(d) by when it would be opened?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEELAHMAD): (a) Dharmapuri Head Post Office construction work will be completed shortly.

(b) and (c) Do not arise in view of (a) above.

(d) It will be opened by the end of January, 2006.

Digital divide between rural and urban areas

2435. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the digital divide between rural and urban areas is increasing day-by-day;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether it is a fact that the digital divide has increased after the removal of mandatory provision of rural telecom service by private telecom operators in 2003; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and the action plan of Government to reserve the trend?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (DR. SHAKEEL AHMAD): (a) and (b) The rural tele-density as on March 1999 was 0.52 as compared to urban tele-density of 2.3. As on 30th September, 2005 the rural tele-density has increased to 1.77 as compared to urban tele-density of 31.25. This is happening because the Telecom service providers (especially those in the private sector) are focusing more on urban areas because of higher revenue per line in urban areas as compared to that in rural areas.

(c) and (d) The rural tele-density as on March 2003 was 1.49 as compared to urban tele-density of 14.32, whereas as on 30th September 2005 the rural tele-density has increased to 1.77 as compared to urban tele-density of 31.25.

To provide support for expansion of telegraph services Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) has been created w.e.f. 1.4.2002. Some of the activities for which support from USOF has been extended include:

(i) Provision of Village Public Telephones (VPTs) in 66,822 remaining unconnected villages excluding villages having population less than 100, lying in thick forest area/naxalite infested areas etc. by November 2007. 14,233 VPTs have been provided as on 31.10.2005.

(ii) Provision of second VPT in the form of Rural Community Phones (RCPs) in villages having population of more than 2,000 and having no PCO by September 2007. 15,946 RCPs have been provided as on 30.09.2005.

(iii) To provide Rural Phone Connectivity 'on demand' in 1,685 commercially unviable Short Distance Charging Areas (SDCAs) by the first quarter of the year 2006.